

The Planning Commission discusses the City short-term lodging proposal

The Bethlehem Gadfly Airbnb, Serious Issues, Short term lodging December 17, 2019

 *Latest in a series of posts on Airbnb and short-term lodging* 

Your tax dollars at work!

Let's look at the Planning Commission in action.

We looked at the “short-term lodging” ordinance newly proposed for the zoning code last time.

And Gadfly asked if it seemed reasonable, asked if you saw anything discussable.

Let's suppose that almost all of us reading here are not offering short-term lodging.

One thing for us to think about is how this ordinance would affect you if you wanted to offer short-term lodging.

Gadfly, for instance, has a five-bedroom house. Suppose he wanted to offer two of them per the proposed ordinance for short-term lodging.

Is the new ordinance reasonable for his purpose? Yes, seems so.

But another thing to think about is how this ordinance would affect you and your mainly residential neighborhood if one or more of your neighbors went into the short-term lodging business.

Yeah, now there's an issue Gadfly is familiar with.

A single woman on the block was offering short-term lodging in the early days of this business, before the others of us were familiar with the concept, and, besides a bit of a crimp in available parking sometimes, we were bothered by the coming and going of strange men at all hours of the night. It gave the neighborhood a different feel. An insecure feel.

Well, what did the Planning Commissioners see?

In this interesting clip, we see the Planning director frame the fair positive purpose of the ordinance (in a time in which affordable housing is an issue, this ordinance allows people to stay in their homes and make a few extra dollars) and then one of the Commissioners (Mr. Malozi) think out some potential problems.

We should note in passing that the Planning director says that when homes are owner occupied, there is no problem with short-term lodging — the problems come in situations when the owners don't live there — that was the rub in the contentious issue in the Northside Historical District..

Mr. Malozi has two questions, the first being could a “transient” (the language of the ordinance) stay the 30 days allowed, leave for a day, and return for another permitted 30 days, and on and on. Gadfly is not sure he sees the problem here. Actually, he feels longer duration of transients might make the situation more comfortable for neighbors. You could get to know or at least recognize the transients, for instance.

The second question seemed more important to Gadfly. Should there be an upper limit of days that lodging could be offered? For instance, could you book your rooms 365 days a year? Hmmm. No specific upper limit was nailed down, but 90 days and 180 days were floated. Mr. Malozi, laudably, was concerned about the quality of the neighborhood with a high number of transients. Yeah, Gadfly gets that.

The PC seemed to favor a revision to accommodate concerns in regard to this second question and, unable to agree on a limitation, they tabled consideration till the next meeting.

Gadfly wondered about some limitation on the number of short-term lodging homes in a particular area. Gadfly lives near Moravian College, a good market, especially at certain times of the year. What if, for instance, instead of the just one short-termers on his block, there would be five. Now that would seriously change the neighborhood. And would be a great worry.

What do you think of the questions Mr. Malozi raised? See anything else?

We aren't done yet with discussion at the meeting. *to be continued . .*